

A Study to Analyze the Challenges Faced by Female Students with Disabilities Who Are Enrolled in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the challenges faced by female students with disabilities enrolled in higher education, focusing on their unique experiences and barriers within academic institutions. In the context of a rapidly evolving educational landscape, the inclusion of students with disabilities is increasingly recognized as essential to achieving equity and social justice. However, female students with disabilities often encounter additional challenges due to the intersectionality of gender and disability, which exacerbates their marginalization in higher education environments.

Findings reveal that financial constraints, insufficient institutional support, and stigmatization significantly impact the pursuit of higher education for female students with disabilities. The psychological toll includes diminished self-esteem, heightened vulnerability to harassment, and feelings of isolation. The study highlights the urgent need for institutional reforms and policy interventions to create an inclusive and supportive environment for female students with disabilities. Recommendations include improving accessibility, providing targeted financial and academic support, raising awareness among faculty and peers, and fostering a culture of empathy and inclusion.

By shedding light on the challenges faced by female students with disabilities in higher education, this study aims to inform stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and institutions, about the steps needed to promote equity and empowerment for this marginalized group. This research contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive education, advocating for a system that ensures equal opportunities for all learners, irrespective of gender or ability.

Keywords: Disability; education; higher; female

Introduction

There is no one who does not know the word "education." Nevertheless, only a small number of people realized its true viewpoint. However, this idea has been around for as long as the human race has been, and the meaning of education as well as the goals that it seeks to accomplish have evolved over the course of history. In order to transform our children into morally upstanding members of society, we now provide them with education, instruct and teach them, socialize with them, and develop them. The purpose of education is to cultivate and empower individuals within a nation via the dissemination of knowledge. According to Goel et al. (2014)

The ultimate goal of education is to bring about a transformation in the personality of humans, bringing about a type of perfection via the development of the body, the augmentation of the mind, the enlightenment of the spirit, and the management of the emotions. In the absence of education, the development and expansion of society are difficult to achieve. Therefore, it is not surprising that prominent educationists have continually reached the conclusion that education is the most important foundation upon which the entire nation is built. When it comes to the transmission and preservation of social values, education is an extremely significant factor. Mehata and Poonga's study from 1997

Learning is the process that constitutes education. In the process of acquiring knowledge, various skills, values, morals, and ethics, which contribute to the development and maturation of the human being, the human being gained knowledge. Educating a child is the means by which they can develop the talents and capabilities that are already present? The development of the nation and the people who live inside it is dependent on the achievement of this competence.

Socrates said, "Education is the process of living through, a continuous reconstruction of experience." Aristotle defined education as "the process of training man to fulfill his aim by exercising all the facilities to the fullest extent as a member of society." Socrates also referred to education as "the process of living through." A quote attributed to John Dewey states that "Education means the bringing out of the ideas of universal validity which are latent in the mind of every man."

The words of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule can be summarized as follows: "Without education, wisdom was lost; without wisdom, morals were lost; without morals, development was lost;

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without wealth, the Shudras were ruined; so much has happened as a result of a lack of education." In addition to this, it was claimed that "Education is most needed to develop intelligence, morality, progress, and prosperity in subordinate class."

"Education should give one the ability to choose between right and wrong," this is what Savitribai Jyotiba Phule says should be the goal of education. She wanted to convey that education is causing us to think about diverse facts, and she wanted to do so. The ability to distinguish between truth and fiction is another benefit of education. For girls' education, Savitribai Phule worked specifically. At that time, the legislation of religion made it illegal for women to receive an education. Savitribai was able to simply convey the significance of education to the females, and now we can see the fruitfulness of her effort. This was done in order to raise awareness about the importance of education among women.

A. Educational Development of Female

It is a common misconception in India that Female who has disabilities will not marry, and as a result, their parents will have to support them financially for the rest of their lives. They do not engage in sexual activity of any kind. Many Indian families had the belief that a disabled son would have a better chance of survival than a disabled daughter.

Literacy among Female is an important factor in the overall development of the country. They must overcome various obstacles, including those related to infrastructure, academics, psychology, society, and the economy, in order to earn a higher education. There is a patriarchal social structure in India. When comparing boys and girls, families and societies typically give more opportunities to the boys. According to the Census completed in 2011, the literacy rate for men is 82%, but the literacy rate for Female is an appalling 65%. According to estimates provided by UNESCO and the world blind union, the global literacy rate for Female who have impairments is estimated to be 1%, but the rate for individuals with disabilities is approximately 3%. In addition, females with disabilities who attend college or university are also at an increased risk of being subjected to sexual assault or physical violence. The difficulties are also experienced by Female who have disabilities, particularly if they require disability-related equipment or special transportation.

The education of Female in India plays an important role in the overall improvement of the country's level of living. The level of education attained by Female contributes to the overall improvement of a nation. The education of Female helps to improve the quality of life in the household as well as in the wider community. This is accomplished through the promotion

and encouragement of children, particularly female children, as well as the reduction of the infant mortality rate. Female make up around 48% of India's overall population, making them a distinct demographic in and of itself.

In India, the lack of equality between the sexes is deeply ingrained in the social conventions that are the source of discrimination against Female. When compared to male students with disabilities, the number of female students with disabilities enrolled in higher education is also quite low. Although there is a reservation system in place for disabled candidates amounting to 3% in public institutions, NCPEDP2015 reports that only about 0.56% of the places in higher education are filled by disabled applicants. There are a total of 74.08% males and 22.70% females in this group. It comprises comments from over 150 different higher education institutions located all throughout the country, such as 16 Indian institutes of technology and 13 Indians institutes of management, as well as responses from other engineering and business schools. Other areas of study include architecture, law, medicine, and hotel management. According to this data, the status of impaired females in higher education is still quite low, just like the situation of disabled males. There are various aspects, such as economic considerations, psychological issues, social factors, family factors, and educational factors, that have an effect on their individual lives and educational experiences.

Research objectives

To investigate the socioeconomic challenges that are faced by female students with disabilities who are enrolled in higher education.

Constitutional Provisions and Legal Framework for Persons with Disabilities

Any democratic country which believes in equality of rights for all its citizens before the law has to provide safe constitutional and legal framework for all the citizens. This becomes a safeguard for human rights and for equalization for opportunities. For disadvantaged groups, the constitution has made special provisions for promoting their rights and for social justice. The constitution of India also provides liberty, equal opportunities and social justice to all its citizens. In the preamble of constitution, it is clearly mentioned to provide justice to all citizens of India.

Fundamental Rights

The constitution of India embodies certain fundamental rights for all the persons of India including men, women, children, person with disabilities, minorities, etc., without any favour.

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Persons with Disabilities are also benefitted from these rights but there is not any specific right for disabled persons. The relevant fundamental articles in Indian Constitution providing constitutional guarantees to all including disabled persons are as follows:

- Article 14 ensures that the 'state' shall not deny to any person equality before the law or all persons are equal (including disabled persons) before the law.
- Article 15 (1) directs the Government of India not to discriminate any citizen of India (including disabled persons) on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- Article 15 (2) states that no citizen shall be subjected to any disability, liability restriction or condition on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them in the matter of their access to any public place.
- Article 16 ensures that 'state' shall provide equality of opportunities to all citizens (including disabled persons) in employment or appointment to any office under the state.
- Article 32 guarantees that every citizen of India (including disabled persons) can move to the Supreme Court of India to enforce his/her fundamental right if a person feels that his/ her fundamental right has been hampered by any other person.
- Article 46 guarantees for free and compulsory education to all children (including disabled children) up to 14 years (18 years in case of disabled children mentioned in PWD Act, 1995).

The Mental Health Act, 1987

This act was the first act passed by the Parliament of India to pay attention on disabled persons. The act was passed in 1987. The act consolidated and amended the law related to the treatment and care of mentally ill persons. The act is divided in to 10 chapters and 98 sections.

The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act, 1992

The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) is a statutory body in the field of education and rehabilitation services to the PWDs. Before this act, providing education and rehabilitation services to the PWDs were on voluntary basis. There were untrained teachers and paraprofessionals. There was also lack of training institutes to train them. Besides this these institute did not have a standard curriculum for training. These necessities made essential to

have statutory or controlling body to regulate these issues. Therefore, RCI was given the status of statutory body by an Act of Parliament in 1993 (Singh & Das, 2014).

The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995

It was the first landmark legislation in the welfare of persons with disabilities. The Act was passed with various measures such as barrier free environments; remove discrimination in the employment, provision of early identification and intervention. There is also provision of establishment of homes for the severely disabled. The Act included 7 disabilities. These were:

- Visual impairment
- Blind
- Leprosy cured persons
- Hearing impairment
- Loco motor disability

Literature Review

Singh (2013) highlights the levels of psychological difficulties that are experienced by Female with disabilities in the Terucheerappali district and stresses that it is necessary to remove all of the hurdles that are experienced by them. He does this in order to highlight the necessity for action. The researcher attempts to analyze the levels of awareness of the benefits that the government and non-government organizations the possibilities of making these sections of the society to be aware of the many benefits that are accessible to them to be aware of the degrees of awareness of the benefits that are available to them. Out of 320 Female in Tericheerappalia, the researcher chose 20 to represent a sample using the descriptive approach, and the sample was picked using the stratified disproportionate random sampling method. The researcher advises that mainstream organizations should provide support to groups that are led by Female who have impairments and work in conjunction with those organizations. Additionally, rehabilitation and adaptive technology should be included in the creation and production of adaptable products.

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Waititu (2013) conducted research on the psychological obstacles that physically challenged students have to overcome in order to be accepted into mainstream secondary schools. The data collection process was carried out utilizing the mixed method paradigm, with descriptive cross-sectional design as well as naturalistic phenomenology design being utilized by the researcher. Researchers used probability and non-probability sampling to come to the conclusion that learners with physical disabilities in integrated schools have low self-esteem, despite the fact that they enjoy warm peer acceptance and both teachers and the support staff related in discriminatively. Researchers also came to the conclusion that parents need to be educated on issues related to disabilities and their key role in assisting their children to maximize their abilities and thus function at their best.

Agrawal (2014) examines the difficulties as well as the potential for growth in India's higher education system. The government has put a lot of work into the statistics, and they've brought up some promising proposals. The author did some research into that topic for the twelfth plan. Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a program that has been initiated by the government. Its objective is to enhance the overall quality of existing state higher education institutes by ensuring conformance to defined norms and standards and using accreditation as a necessary quality assurance framework. The author conducted research on the Education and Research Bill 2011 and the National Depository Bill 2011.

Dendena (2015) conducted research in the Gedeo zone of southern Ethiopia to study the psychological and social issues faced by Female with impairments. It was a qualitative study that was conducted with the participation of 26 people from the towns of Dilla, Wenago, and yergacheffe. The data were gathered by the researcher through methods such as non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, examination of documents, and field notes. Transcribing verbatim and recording discussions were both used by the researcher for the examination of the data. The study found that as a result of these social problems, the subjects were put in situations where they faced social challenges such as expression, worry, fear, and a feeling that they were not valuable.

According to the findings of this study by Petros (2016), the number of female students enrolling in classes across all educational levels is rising at a startlingly rapid pace. This research was carried out at Bahir Dar University with the intention of determining the socio-economic determinants that have an impact on the academic performance of female students with disabilities who are enrolled there. In the study, a mixed paradigm was utilized, and the

descriptive method along with non-probabilistic research approaches were used. In order to collect information that was relevant to the study, we used questionnaires, interviews, observations, and other relevant documents. The data obtained by the researcher was compiled using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, and mean. The findings of this study focused on the socio-economic factors that affect female students' academic performance. These factors include the economic position of the students' parents, the growth of Khat (stimulating green leaf) businesses, tourist attractions, and night clubs in the area around the institution, and so on.

Specifically, according to Nair (2010), who wrote an article with the title "Female education in India: A situational analysis," there is a significant disparity in the levels of literacy among males and females. In secondary and higher education, girls have a greater dropout rate and a lower enrolment rate than boys. Additionally, she emphasized on the fact that the level of education in rural areas is three times lower than the level of education in metropolitan areas. In general, the situation of girls' education is quite bad in rural areas because to the contentious traditions, religious ceremonies, and customs that are practiced there.

In 2014, Marium published a paper with the title "Female Level of Education and its Effect on Domestic Violence in Rural Bangladesh." The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the educational level of women and the occurrence of domestic violence. When it comes to acquiring knowledge of her own rights, the uneducated female found it challenging. Every day of her life, she was confronted with challenges such as mental and physical disease, and she was unable to fight against violence. Women continue to be subjected to oppression. Education may assist to prevent domestic violence and to preserve a supportive family and social environment for females to accomplish their self-development, according to the conclusion of the paper, which states that education can play a significant part in destroying the harmful practices in society that lead females to be suppressed.

According to Ali and Kulane (2013), in her paper titled "Dowry practices and their negative consequences from a female perspective in Karachi, Pakistan — A qualitative study," the author states that the dowry practices, which include death, violence, physiological and psychological problems, and other consequences, have a negative impact on the status of women as well as their opportunities to develop and educate themselves. While this is going on, who is hurt by the dowry and abuses that women who are not literate are subjected to?

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There was a dowry for women who were uneducated. Throughout her whole life, women are impacted by the repercussions of illiteracy.

According to Raman (2006), the percentage of females who were literate throughout the time of the British Raj and up until the time of India's independence was just 2.6% of the entire population of females. This demonstrates that the literacy rate among women is significantly lower than that of males. From a historical perspective, Raman provided a description of the educational position of women. Still, the situation has not changed; the literacy percentage among women, particularly rural women, is far lower than it should be. According to the census completed in 2011, the literacy percentage of females is 65.5%. This scenario may be attributed to a number of variables, including social, economic, and cultural considerations. The advancement of women is absolutely necessary for the advancement of the nation. However, the lesser standing of women in society has prevented them from getting the fundamental and constitutional rights that they are entitled to.

(Kwon & Prakash, 2016) In her paper titled "Dowry: household responses to expected marriage payment," she reports that weddings between people of higher castes had the largest dowry. Educated girls have a higher dowry payment. The reason for this is because parents who belong to higher castes are not interested in providing their daughter with a higher education. One of the reasons why the girl's sex ratio was reduced was because of the dowry involved. There is a terrible custom known as dowry in India. This ceremony has a significant impact on a great number of women, including the fact that they are taken away from birth, education, maltreatment after marriage, and violence, while their parents believe that education is a waste of time for girls. After they have completed their education, what do they do? It is only possible for a woman to care for her husband and her children. This kind of attitude is detrimental to the future of the girls as well as to the nation itself.

According to Saxena (2008), who was published in the book "In-service Teacher Education on Girls Education" under the chapter titled "Girls education: constraints and barriers," she states that girls school, hostel facilities, and school time will also have an effect on girls education. The girls' education is continually hindered by the social, cultural, and physical environment that they are surrounded by. In addition, she made the observation that there was inequality occurring in a variety of settings inside the villages, including the home, society, schools, businesses, and governmental decision-making. This attitude develops among teachers as well, which has an effect on education.

According to Patel (2014), in his research paper titled "An Analytical Study of Female Education in The Backward Area of Panchmahal District," he cites the following: "Modern studies suggested that female education is more important than male education for social and economic development." There is a significant role that women play in both the family and society; thus, if we educate them, we are also educating the nation. The contrast of the educational opportunities available to women in rural and urban areas is something that he discovers. The opinions of teachers about female education, the obstacles that stand in the way of female education, and the efforts that may be taken to overcome these obstacles. In this particular study, the researchers place an emphasis on specific hurdles such as socio-economic and cultural factors, as well as the attitude of parents.

In 2011, Hira published a paper with the title "Challenges to Free and Compulsory Education." In this paper, she studied a case and came to the conclusion that working girls are not interested in attending school, and their parents also did not want to send their children to school. As a result of the limited financial assistance from the family, the girl, who is a member of the first generation of learners, loses interest in studying owing to a variety of causes. There is a lack of awareness among parents regarding the significance of education, and they also fail to provide their children with the necessary teaching and training on education. This is the reason why working girls spend the majority of their time helping their parents with domestic chores. However, once the Free and Compulsory Education Act was passed, the mother of the girl in question was able to secure employment in the Midday Meal Scheme after persuading her mother that she was willing to provide her daughter with an education. This presents a challenge to the concept of free and obligatory education since it raises awareness among parents about education and the act.

The authors of the study titled "Socio-cultural barriers on girls' educational attainment experiences from rural Bangladesh," Sarkar, Reza, and Hossain (2014), suggest that the gender incentives education system is a contributor to the limitation of girls' educational opportunities. To a greater extent than they do for girls, parents in rural areas make it easier for boys to attend school. Within the rural areas of Bangladesh, the patriarchal system is still in place in the 21st century. Continuing one's education is made more difficult for girls due to the callous attitude of men and the religious prejudices that they have, as the paper explains. There is never any belief among religious organizations regarding the empowerment of women and the education of girls. It was their belief that if a woman were to get an

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education, she would be unable to tolerate the supremacy of men. Girls face a variety of barriers on their path to education as a result of the attitude that society has.

In a research study titled "Influence of Socio-Economic and Educational Background of Parents on their Children's Education in Nigeria," Kainuwa, Binti, and Yusuf (2013) discovered that the reason why parents do not educate their children or remove them from school is because they do not have sufficient financial means. Most parents who are only educated up to the elementary level do not invest money in their children's education, but parents who have a high level of education provide their children with a quality education and even higher levels of education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our study sheds light on the complex intersection of gender, disability, and socio-economic factors in shaping the experiences of female students within higher education. By highlighting the diverse and often divergent challenges faced by individuals within this demographic, we underscore the need for tailored and intersectional approaches to support. Through proactive measures aimed at addressing socio-economic disparities and fostering inclusive environments, we can work towards creating a future where all female students, regardless of disability or socio-economic background, have the opportunity to succeed and thrive within higher education and beyond.

Socio-economic factors play a pivotal role in exacerbating academic challenges for female students with disabilities, as revealed by our research. Accessibility issues, ranging from physical barriers to technological limitations, often hinder these students' ability to fully engage with their academic environments. Moreover, inadequate institutional support further compounds these challenges, leaving many female students with disabilities feeling marginalized and unsupported in their educational pursuits.

One of the key findings of our study was the varied perceptions of support from institutions among female students with disabilities. While some individuals reported receiving adequate assistance and accommodations, others expressed frustration at the lack of understanding and responsiveness from their educational institutions. This disparity underscores the necessity of targeted interventions to address the unique needs of different disability groups effectively.

For instance, students with physical disabilities may require specific accommodations such as accessible transportation, modified classroom furniture, or sign language interpreters, while those with neurodevelopmental disorders may benefit from personalized learning strategies or assistive technologies. By tailoring support measures to the specific needs of each disability group, institutions can better address the challenges faced by female students with disabilities and create a more inclusive learning environment.

Furthermore, our research highlights the importance of addressing underlying socio-economic barriers that exacerbate academic challenges for female students with disabilities. Financial constraints, limited access to healthcare and support services, and discrimination in employment opportunities are just a few examples of the systemic issues that disproportionately affect this demographic. Without adequate support to overcome these barriers, many female students with disabilities are left struggling to access the resources and accommodations they need to succeed academically.

In light of these findings, it is clear that a multifaceted approach is needed to support female students with disabilities effectively. This includes not only improving accessibility and institutional support but also addressing broader socio-economic factors that contribute to inequality and exclusion. By working collaboratively with policymakers, educators, and support services, we can develop targeted interventions that empower female students with disabilities to overcome academic challenges and thrive in higher education and beyond.

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